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21 June 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Indochina Division

SUBJECT : Assessment of DDI/SRS Working Paper,  
The Question of the Khmer Communist  
Order of Battle

1. Adams is quite right in asserting that methodologies for estimating enemy strength should not be confined to the ultraconservative. This is particularly true with regard to Khmer Communist strength in Cambodia, concerning which our information base is known to be sparse. Lacking specific information, it is logical to seek meaningful parallels in the much larger and more complete fund of information on the enemy's infrastructure, organizational technique and degree of success in South Vietnam and Laos, as Adams has done. His methodology has yielded very thought-provoking and useful analyses. Assumptions as to the manner and extent to which parallels may be drawn are conjectural, however -- as Adams concedes -- and we take exception to some of the assumptions he has made.

2. Before dealing with these, however, it should be pointed out that the "current CIA/DIA OB of Khmer Communist soldiers" which Adams cites pertains only to combat forces.\* For lack of information, no attempt was made to estimate the numbers of Khmers in what we would term "administrative services", a category that is included in Adams' estimates. Secondly, aside from any consideration of Adams' analysis, information that has become available in the past week or two seems to justify an upward revision in the estimate of KC strength. The most significant new information was provided by a rallier who had been assigned to an infiltration station on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. His testimony that some 9,000 Hanoi-trained Khmer Communist cadre came down the trail in the period January 1968 - May 1970, reflects

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\* See para. 6 of ER IM 71-82.

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not only a higher KC strength, but -- more significantly -- implies a far great capability for recruiting and organizing an infrastructure among the Khmers than had been generally conceded.

3. With regard to KC strength in largely VC/NVA units, Adams has applied a 10-20% estimate to the estimated 50,000 strength of VC/NVA Main Force units in Cambodia. (See para. 20) It seems likely, however, that the VC/NVA would be recruiting Khmers very largely for only those VC/NVA forces targeted against Cambodia, i.e., for less than half of the VC/NVA combat units located there. (As of late May, only 9 of 22 VC/NVA regiments in Cambodia appeared to be targeted against the GKR.) There is also the question of whether a Khmer attached to a communist unit should be counted in unit strength or considered a civilian employee, willing or not. This problem is acknowledged (in para. 18), but probably is unduly discounted.

4.. As for KC strength in largely Khmer units, an estimate of 15-20,000 KC is derived from reports indicating the existence of a number of KC regiments, whereas we have identified only one operational regiment that has a high percentage of Khmers (the VC/KC 203rd Regiment of the VC 5th Division): No distinction is made between units of regimental echelon and units of regimental size. Furthermore, the assignment of strength figure of 750 men per regiment does not seem as "conservative" as described. The latter overstatement is compounded by its doubling to account for units of smaller echelon, as well as support units, whose existence has not been established. In this instance, the drawing of a parallel between the service structure in South Vietnam many years ago is not necessarily justified.

5. As Adams concedes, "any estimate of the number of Khmer soldiers at the province level should come with a large dose of salt". (See para. 41) Even more so, for district level units. Their combined strength is estimated -- on the basis of very sparse and conflicting data -- to be 20-30,000. An obvious inconsistency exists in the few reports cited regarding district level strengths. Specifically, nine district level units are attributed to Pursat Province where Communist control is very light, whereas only two each

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are cited for Takeo and Svay Rieng provinces where the Communist presence is much stronger. (See paras. 36-38) Furthermore, the latter have much larger Khmer populations to draw upon (567,000 and 352,000 respectively, compared with Pursat's 220,000). Additionally, the assignment of 500 to 750 KC to each province and 100 to 150 to each district appears to be unjustifiably large considering the sparse information base as well as the large variations in extent of communist presence and populations of Cambodia's 19 province and more than 100 districts.

6. The estimate that the Communists have been at least half as successful in Cambodia as in South Vietnam and Laos in recruiting "guerilla-militia" from local populations under their control is indeed conjectural and questionable. The existence of Communist guerilla forces in the northeast as early as 1968 and the Communists' success in rallying Cambodians immediately after the ousting of Sihanouk are cited as supporting evidence. Actually, the Khmer Loeu natives in the northeast are more anti-intruder than pro-Communist. They welcomed VC/NVA arms because they were needed to combat Cambodian efforts to open the northeast to Khmer settlement. There is evidence that they often resist VC/NVA efforts to exploit them. There is also abundant evidence that, in other parts of Cambodia, the Khmer have become disenchanted with VC/NVA exhortations to join the Communists in restoring Sihanouk to power. Defections have taken a heavy toll on KC strength. Considering, these factors and the shorter period of time that the VC/NVA have had for a concentrated organizational effort in Cambodia, the 3% figure does not appear conservative.

*Untrue*

7. Also, it is highly debateable that more than two million of Cambodia's nearly 7 million population are outside GKR control, or under VC/NVA control. The definition of "control" is a critical issue. A year ago, we estimated that about 2 million Cambodians normally lived in areas conceded to be under VC/NVA control. The geographical limits of their so-called control have not changed significantly in the interim, but the number of refugees from the Communist incursions is estimated to total at least one million, possibly as much as two million. It is doubtful then, that more than 2 million should be considered under Communist control even under a loose interpretation of that term.

*2 million is probably a conservative figure.*

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8. Another bit of contradictory evidence is that FANK has had significant success in recruiting from outside of urban areas, i.e., from the countryside, where "Communist-control" is generally conceded. Furthermore, there has been very substantial FANK recruitment from "enemy-controlled" areas around isolated Kompong Thom, as well as from areas bordering on VC/NVA concentrations in Kompong Cham province.

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Laos and Cambodia Branch